

## **Crucial Conversation**

- Crucial conversations are situations when we have opposing opinions which are accompanied by strong emotions and the topic in discussion has high stakes. The unfortunate reality of crucial conversation is that when the stakes are the highest we tend to do our worst.
- Crucial Conversations make or break companies.
  - In the worst companies managers don't have the courage to hold crucial conversations with bad performers. They rather ignore them and transfer them within the organization.
  - In good companies, everyone is accountable for their decisions. Managers take care of bad performers which is better for the organization and for the individual as well.

### **1. The Power of Dialogue:**

- a. The pool of shared meaning is the birthplace of synergy.

### **2. Start With Heart:**

#### **a. Work on Me First**

- i. Focus on self-control: Emphasize that the only person you can directly control is yourself. This means prioritizing self-awareness and self-regulation in challenging conversations.

## **b. Focus on What You Really Want**

- i. Recognize Motives: Pay attention to your motives as the conversation unfolds. Are you veering towards silence or violence? Are you seeking to save face, win, be right, or punish others?
- ii. Clarify Objectives: Ask yourself what you want for yourself, for others, and for the relationship. This helps in aligning your actions with your desired outcomes.
- iii. Behavior Alignment: Assess how your behavior reflects your underlying motives. If your actions don't align with what you truly want, consider adjusting them accordingly.

## **c. Refuse the Sucker's Choice**

- i. Identify Sucker's Choices: Be mindful of situations where you're presented with limited, undesirable options, forcing you into a lose-lose scenario.
- ii. Challenge Dichotomies: Question the false dichotomies presented by Sucker's Choices. Instead of accepting only two options, explore the possibility of a third, more constructive path.
- iii. Search for the "And": Combine what you want with what you don't want to create an "and" question. This prompts your brain to seek creative solutions that address both concerns.

d. **Example:**

- i. Scenario: You're in a meeting where a colleague is criticizing your approach to a project in front of others.
- ii. Recognize Motives: You notice yourself feeling defensive and wanting to retaliate to save face.
- iii. Clarify Objectives: You want to maintain a professional image, foster collaboration, and ensure the project's success.
- iv. Behavior Alignment: You realize that snapping back at your colleague won't align with your goals of professionalism and collaboration.
- v. Identify Sucker's Choice: The situation presents a Sucker's Choice: either defend yourself aggressively or remain silent and resentful.
- vi. Challenge Dichotomies: Instead of accepting these options, you consider if there's a way to address your colleague's concerns respectfully while also asserting your perspective.
- vii. Search for the "And": You formulate an "and" question: "How can I address my colleague's critique constructively without compromising my professionalism or the project's success?"

3. **Learn to Look:**

- a. **Conditions**. There are special signs that can help you spot the moment:
  - i. Firstly, these can be physical signals: you may feel that your stomach gets tight, and your eyes

get dry. Different people may get different body signals, so think about yours.

- ii. Secondly, your emotions: you may feel that you're getting angry, scared, or hurt.
- iii. Thirdly, behavioral signals: you may notice you raise your voice, become quiet, point your finger, etc.

b. **Safety problems.** Nothing kills flow of meaning like fear: when you feel people don't like your ideas, you either push harder, or hide. This way, the most obvious signs that people feel unsafe are violence and silence.

i. The three forms of violence are:

- 1. Controlling - making others think the way you do.
- 2. Labeling - dismissing people or ideas under a stereotype or a category.
- 3. Attacking - belittling and threatening a person who disagrees with you.

ii. The forms of silence include:

- 1. Masking - disguising your true opinion under sarcasm or sugarcoating.
- 2. Avoiding - not addressing sensitive issues at all.
- 3. Withdrawing - exiting the conversation (or the room).

iii. Neither violence nor silence makes a conversation productive. We should understand what exactly is our Style Under Stress, and then change it, doing everything possible to make the conversation safe:

1. If you make it safe enough, you can talk about almost anything and people will listen. If you don't fear that you're being attacked or humiliated, you yourself can hear almost anything and not become defensive.

iv. To become a self-monitor pay attention to

1. What you are doing
2. The impact it is having
3. Then alter your behavior as necessary
4. Become aware of your style under stress

#### **4. Make It Safe: How to Make It Safe to Talk about Almost Anything**

##### **a. Making it safe to dialogue:**

###### **i. Worst at it:**

1. ignore the need for safety
2. Express what is on their minds without regard for how it will be received

###### **ii. Good at it:**

1. recognize safety is at risk, but do the wrong thing
2. Water down their content, which avoids the real problem

**iii. Best at it:**

1. step out of content, make it safe, then re-enter.

**b. Mutual Purpose:**

**i. First condition for safety:**

1. Entry condition for dialogue
  - a. “Mutual Purpose means that others perceive that we are working toward a common
  - b. outcome in the conversation, that we care about their goals, interests, and values. And vice versa. We believe they care about ours” (p. 69).

**ii. When purpose is at risk, conversations evolve into debates.**

1. Signs include: defensiveness, hidden agendas, accusations, circling back to the same topic.

**iii. Questions for determining when Mutual Purpose is at risk:**

1. Do others believe I care about their goals in this conversation?
2. Do they trust my motives?

**iv. “Mutual Respect is the continuance condition of dialogue” (p. 71).**

- v. When respect is lost the conversation becomes about defending dignity.
- vi. Disrespect creates highly charged emotions.
- vii. It is always possible to find a way to respect another's basic humanity.
- viii. Respect doesn't mean acceptance or agreement with other's behavior.
- ix. **Respect prayer:**
  - 1. "Lord, help me forgive those who sin differently than I" (p. 72).

**c. Rebuild Mutual Purpose or Mutual Respect in the following ways:**

- i. Apologize when you have made a mistake that has negatively effected others.
  - 1. This means giving up saving face, being right, or winning.
- ii. Contrast to repair misunderstandings.
  - 1. Don't statement: address other's concerns that you don't respect them.
  - 2. Do statement: confirm your respect and clarify you purpose.
- iii. CRIB to get to Mutual Purpose.
  - 1. Worst at dialogue ignore the problem, push ahead or give in to the other.
  - 2. Good at dialogue compromise.

**3. Best at dialogue CRIB :**

- a. Commit to seek mutual purpose
  - b. Verbally agree to arriving at a solution that is mutually acceptable.
  - c. Recognize the purpose behind the strategy.
- 4. We confuse what we're asking for (strategy) with what we want (purpose) Focus on real purposes.
- 5. Invent a mutual purpose
  - a. If you can't agree on a mutual purpose, invent one that has a higher more encompassing long-term goal.
  - b. Transcend short-term compromise.
- 6. Brainstorm new strategies

## 5. Master My Stories:

### How to stay in Dialogue when you're Angry, Scared, or Hurt:

- a. **"When it comes to strong emotions, you either find a way to master them or fall hostage to them" (p. 95).**
  - i. Worst at dialogue: hostage to their emotions and don't even know it.
  - ii. Good at dialogue: know they need to control their emotions so they fake it.
  - iii. Best at dialogue: negotiate their emotions by thinking them out.



- b. Between perception and emotion is the story we tell ourselves about what is happening. The story we tell determines the emotions we have.

**c. Stories:**

- i. Are interpretations of facts
  - ii. Explain what we see and hear
  - iii. Help use evaluate the situation
  - iv. Tell us what we should do about the situation
  - v. Once told they take on a life of their own
- d. “While it’s true that at first we are in control of the stories we tell – after all, we do make them [stories] up of our own accord - once they’re told, the stories control us” (p. 101).

**e. Skill for Mastering Our Stories:**

- i. Notice your behavior – ask:
  - 1. Am I in some form of silence or violence?
- ii. Get in touch with your feelings – ask:
  - 1. What emotions are encouraging me to act this way?
- iii. Analyze your stories – ask:
  - 1. What story is creating these emotions?
- iv. Get back to the facts – ask:
  - 1. What evidence do I have to support this story?

## **f. Analyze Your Stories:**

- i. Regain emotional control by asking:
  - 1. Is this the only right emotional response to the situation?
  - 2. Questioning our feeling leads to questioning our stories
- ii. Separate subjective conclusions from objective facts by asking:
  - 1. Can I see or hear this thing I'm labeling a fact?
  - 2. Was it an actual behavior?
  - 3. Conclusions explain what you think not what actually happened.
- iii. Watch for emotionally laden words by asking:
  - 1. What words carry an undertone of judgment or attributes?
  - 2. Less volatile descriptions allow for multiple interpretations.

## **g. 3 Clever Stories:**

- i. Clever stories “allow us to feel good about behaving badly even while achieving abysmal results” (p. 106).
- ii. Victim Stories – “it’s not my fault”
  - 1. We are innocent sufferers

2. We ignore the role we play in contributing to the problem
3. We have nothing but the most noble of intentions

iii. Villain Stories – “it’s all your fault”

1. We attribute negative motives to the other person We exaggerate our own innocence
2. We overemphasize the other person’s guilt
3. We dehumanize the other person by making unfair generalizations
4. We justify our own ineffective behavior

iv. Helpless Stories – “there’s nothing else I can do”

1. We assume there is no alternative to our predicament
2. Explains why we can’t do anything to change our situation
3. Attribute fixed and unchangeable traits to the other person

**h. Why we tell clever stories:**

- i. They match reality – on occasion
- ii. They excuse us from taking responsibility
- iii. Keep us from having to acknowledge when we have acted against our own sense of what’s right

- i. “You don’t start telling clever stories until after you failed to do something you knew you should have done” (p. 111).
- j. “We tell clever stories when we want self-justification more than results” (p. 112).
- k. Useful Stories Create emotions that lead to healthy productive action – dialogue
- l. To turn victims into actors – ask:**
  - i. What am I pretending not to notice about how I contribute to this problem?
  - ii. Am I minimizing my role while exaggerating the role of others?
- m. To turn villains into humans – ask:**
  - i. What would cause a reasonable, rational, decent human being to do what they are doing?
  - ii. Replace judgment with empathy and self-justification with personal accountability.
  - iii. Worry less about other’s intentions and more on the effect their actions have on us.
  - iv. Dialogue is “the only reliable way of discovering others’ genuine motives” (p. 114).
- n. To turn the helpless into the able – ask:**
  - i. What do I really want? For me? For others? For the relationship?
  - ii. What would I do right now if I really wanted these results?

## 6. Master My Stories:

### How to Speak Persuasively Not Abrasively

a. To speak honestly it is important also maintain safety.

**b. 3 Ingredients for speaking the unspeakable while maintaining respect:**

- i. Confidence
- ii. Humility
- iii. Skill

c. **STATE** : Tools for talking about sensitive topics

- i. **S** hare your facts
- ii. **T** ell your story
- iii. **A** sk for others' paths
- iv. **T** alk tentatively
- v. **E** ncourage testing

**d. S hare your facts:**

i. We often start by sharing our conclusions, which are often ill founded, rather than the facts that led to our conclusions.

ii. Facts are:

1. Less controversial than conclusions
2. More persuasive than conclusions
3. Less insulting than conclusions

e. "Facts form the foundation of belief".

f. “Our goal is not to persuade others that we are right. . . . We just want our meaning to get a fair hearing”.

g. “If you do want to share your story, don’t start with it”

**h. Tell your story:**

i. “The facts alone are rarely worth mentioning. It’s the facts plus the conclusion that call for a face-to-face discussion”.

ii. **When telling your story, remember,**

1. It takes courage and confidence
2. Telling all our insulting conclusions and negative judgments doesn’t work
3. To keep a look out for safety problems

**i. Ask for others’ paths**

i. “We express our confidence by sharing our facts and stories clearly. We demonstrate our humility by then asking others to share their views”.

**j. Ask:**

- i. What does the other person know, what are their facts?
- ii. What are the other person’s intentions?
- iii. What does the other person really want?

#### **k. Talk tentatively**

- i. Tell your story as a story rather than as reality or as fact.
- ii. Observations can be incomplete, biased, and generally faulty.
- iii. Use of tentative language does not mean being wimpy.

#### **iv. Examples: A "Good" Story-The Goldilocks Test**

1. To get a feel for how to best share your story, making sure that you're neither too hard nor too soft, consider the following examples:
2. Too soft: "This is probably stupid, but . . ."
3. Too hard: "How come you ripped us off?"
4. Just right: "It's starting to look like you're taking this home for your own use. Is that right?"
5. Too soft: "I'm ashamed to even mention this, but . . ."  
Too hard: "Just when did you start using hard drugs?"
6. Just right: "It's leading me to conclude that you're starting to use drugs. Do you have another explanation that I'm missing here?"
7. Too soft: "It's probably my fault, but . . ."
8. Too hard: "You wouldn't trust your own mother to make a one-minute egg!"
9. Just right: "I'm starting to feel like you don't trust me. Is that what's going on here? If so, I'd like to know what I did to lose your trust."

#### **l. Encourage testing**

- i. "The only limit to how strongly you can express your opinion is your willingness to be equally vigorous in encouraging others to challenge it".

**ii. Remember to**

1. Invite opposing views when none are forthcoming
2. Make your invitation genuine
3. Play devil's advocate – challenge your own thinking

**m. To initiate STATE skills;**

- i. Turn your attention from the topic to yourself
- ii. Remember others have something to say, so listen
- iii. Catch yourself before pushing too hard
- iv. "Hold to your belief; merely soften your approach".

**7. Explore Others' Paths:**

**How to Listen When Others Blow Up or Clam Up**

- a. Clam Up: refusing to speak our mind.
- b. Blow Up: speaking in an abusive or insulting manner.
- c. "Restoring safety is your greatest hope to get your relationship back on track".
- d. "Getting to the source of fear and discomfort is the best way to return to dialogue"
- e. When others' are telling their stories help them retrace their paths to action:
  - i. We see the action at the end of their stories



- ii. Move them from emotions to conclusions to observations
  - iii. This helps resolve emotions at its source
  - iv. All this requires genuine listening on our part
- f. 4 Listening Tools for helping others share their paths to action

i. **AMPP:**

- 1. Ask them to tell their stories
- 2. Mirror to confirm feelings
- 3. Paraphrase to acknowledge their story
  - a. Indicates you are trying to understand and that it is safe to continue talking
- 4. Prime when you're getting nowhere
  - a. Say what you think they are most likely thinking
  - b. Use only if the other tools haven't worked

ii. **Remember the ABC's Agree:**

- 1. **Agree** where you do
  - a. Disagreement typically is over only 5-10% of the facts and stories

2. **Build:** if others leave something out, agree where you do, then build
3. **Compare:** When you do differ significantly, don't suggest others are wrong. Compare your two views.

## 8. Move to Action:

### How to Turn Crucial Conversations into Actions and Results

- a. 2 Reasons for failing to put ideas into action:
  - i. Unclear expectations about how decisions will be made
  - ii. Don't follow-up on taking action
- b. Dialogue is not decision making
  - i. Beginnings of dialogue are risky because they require safety.
  - ii. Endings of dialogue are risky because they require clarification of conclusions and decisions.
- c. Deciding on how decisions are made:
  - i. Dialogue is a process for sharing meaning hence everyone is involved.
  - ii. "Because everyone is allowed to share their meaning . . . doesn't mean then they are

guaranteed to take part in making all the decisions”

- d. Whoever is in the position of authority decides which method of decision making will be used.
- e. “When decision-making authority is unclear, use your best dialogue skills to get meaning into the pool. Jointly decide how to decide”.

**f. 4 Methods of Decision Making:**

- i. **Command:** Decisions made by authority without involvement of others.

- 1. External Authority: Authority decides what to do, others decide how to make it work.

- 2. Turning decisions over to another: Low-stakes issue that we trust another to make right decision.

- 3. Consider the following:

- a. If people can make choices, allow them to do so.
- b. Define degrees of freedom and allow others to choose within them.
- c. Explain your reasons for making your decision.

ii. **Consult:** Authority invites others to influence them before making a decision.

1. Use consultation when:

- a. Many people are affected.
- b. Information can be gathered relatively easily.
- c. People care about the decision.
- d. There are many options, some of which are controversial.

2. Consider the following:

- a. Don't pretend to consult.
- b. Announce what you are doing.
- c. Report your decision.

iii. **Vote:** Used when selecting from a number of good options.

- 1. Great time saver but should not be used when people don't agree to support the outcome.
- 2. Use voting only when you know that the losers don't really care about the result.
- 3. Use for reducing long lists to a short list; follow-up with consensus.

4. Never replace patient analysis and healthy dialogue with voting
- iv. **Consensus:** Everyone honestly agrees to one decision.
  1. Use only with:
    - a. High-stakes and complex issues.
    - b. Issues where everyone absolutely must support the final choice.
    - c. Everyone shares a common agenda.
  2. Consider the following:
    - a. Don't force consensus onto everything.
    - b. Don't pretend that everyone will get their first choice.
    - c. If you don't get your choice, don't be a martyr.
    - d. Don't take turns, base your decision on merit.
    - e. Don't engage in post-decision lobbying.
    - f. If the decision fails, don't say "I told you so."

**g. 4 Questions to ask when deciding how to decide:**

- i. Who Cares?:
  1. Determine who wants to be involved.
  2. Don't involve those who don't care.
- ii. Who Knows?:

1. Who has the expertise you need to make the decision.
2. Don't involve those who contribute no new information.

iii. Who Must Agree?:

1. Involve those whose cooperation you might need in the form of authority or influence in any decision you make.

iv. How many people is it worth involving?:

1. Involve the fewest number of people that will still make for a quality decision.

v. Additional questions to ask:

1. Do we have enough people to make a good decision?
2. Will others have to be involved to gain their commitment?

h. 4 Elements for putting decisions into action:

- i. Who?: Assign a name to every responsibility.
- ii. Does What?: Define the exact deliverable.
- iii. By When?: Set deadlines.
- iv. How will you follow-up?: Set up an accountability process.

i. Document the above.

- i. "When someone fails to deliver on a promise, it's time for dialogue" (p. 177).

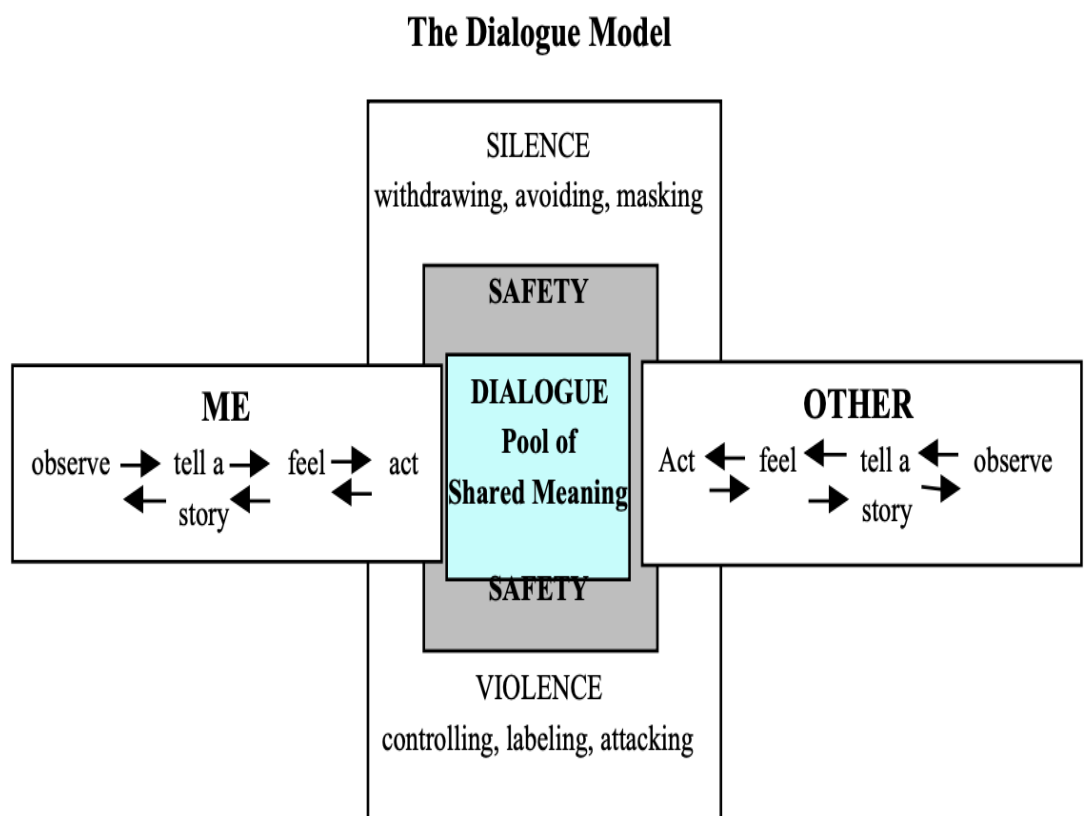
## 9. Putting It All Together: Tools for Preparing and Learning:

a. 2 Levers for Positive Change: Building and Maintaining Dialogue

### b. Learn to Look Ask:

- i. Are we in or out of dialogue?
- ii. Are we falling into silence or violence?

c. **Make it Safe:** When you notice the conversation has moved out of dialogue do something to make it safe



Use this model to diagnose what is going on in your conversation.

d. Ask the following questions:

- i. Where am I?
- ii. Where are others?
- iii. Are we in dialogue or in some form of silence or violence?
- iv. Where do I want to be?
- v. Where do I want others to be?

**e. Coaching for Crucial Conversations:**

i. Principle: Start with heart.

1. Skill: Focus on what you really want.
2. Ask: What do I really want?

ii. Skill: Refuse the sucker's choice.

1. Ask: What do I not want?

iii. Principle: Learn to Look.

1. Skill: Look for when a conversation becomes crucial.
  - a. safety problems.
  - b. own style under stress.
2. Ask: Am I going into silence or violence? Are others?

iv. Principle: Make it safe.

1. Skill: Apologize when appropriate.
  - a. Contrast to fix misunderstandings.
  - b. CRIB to get to mutual respect.
  - c. Ask: Why is safety at risk?
    - i. Have I established mutual respect?
    - ii. Am I maintaining mutual respect?
    - iii. What will I do to rebuild safety?

v. Principle: Master My Story.

1. Skill: Retrace my path to action.
2. Separate fact from story.



3. Watch for victim, villain, and helpless stories.
4. Tell the rest of the story.
5. Ask: What is my story?
  - a. What am I pretending not to know about my role in the problem?
  - b. Why would a reasonable, rational, decent person act like this?
  - c. What should I do right now to move toward what I really want?

#### vi. Principle: STATE My Path.

1. Skill: Share my facts.
  - a. Tell my story.
  - b. Ask for others' paths.
  - c. Talk tentatively.
  - d. Encourage testing.
  - e. Ask: Am I really open to others' views?
    - i. Am I talking about the real issue?
    - ii. Am I confidently expressing my own views?

#### vii. Principle: Explore Others' Paths.

1. Skill: Ask; Mirror; Paraphrase; P prime.
  - a. Ask: Am I actively exploring others' path?
2. Skill: Agree; Build; Compare.
  - a. Ask: Am I avoiding unnecessary disagreement?

#### viii. Principle: Move to Action.

1. Skill: Decide how you will decide.
  - a. Document decisions and follow-up.
2. Ask: How will we make decisions?
  - a. Who will do what by when?
  - b. How will we follow-up?

## **10. Yeah, But: Advice for Tough Cases.**

### **a. Case: Sexual and Other Harassment**

- i. Solution: Tell the rest of the story with respectful, private but firm conversation most cases will be resolved.

### **b. Case: Overly Sensitive Spouse person is touchy or doesn't take feedback well, or you don't give feedback well.**

- i. Solution: Learn how to STATE your path.
- ii. Learn to look for signs that safety is at risk.

### **c. Case: Failure to Live up to Agreements**

- i. Solution: Speak up and let the other know that they aren't living up to the agreement.
- ii. Success is dependent upon holding crucial conversations.

### **d. Case: Deference to Authority**

- i. 2 mistakes we make when faced with deference
  - 1. Misdiagnoses: blame others; miss own contribution.
  - 2. Command it away: tell others to stop deferring.
- ii. Solution: Discover your contribution to the problem.
- iii. If problems stem from previous relationships, go public.
- iv. Encourage and reward those who challenge you.
- v. Play devil's advocate if need be.

### **e. Case: Failed trust**

- i. Trust is topic specific and doesn't need to be an all or nothing matter.
- ii. Trust takes two forms – motive and ability.
- iii. Solution: Deal with trust around the issue, not around the person.
  - 1. Tentatively STATE what you see happening.
  - 2. Don't let mistrust in one area influence trust in another.

**f. Case: Won't Talk about Anything Serious**

- i. Either they or you or both of you aren't good at dialogue, so they think.
- ii. Solution: Work on yourself first.
  - 1. Make it safe to talk.
  - 2. Use tentative language.
  - 3. Separate intent from outcome.
  - 4. Exercise patience.
  - 5. Establish a compelling mutual purpose.

**g. Case: Vague but Annoying**

- i. Problem may be your level of tolerance.
- ii. Retrace your path to action to identify exactly what is going on.
- iii. Clarify the facts first.
- iv. Solution: Ensure that the behaviors you are concerned with are worth talking about.

**h. Case: Shows no Initiative**

- i. Solution: Deal with overall pattern of behavior rather than a specific incident.
- ii. Establish new and higher expectations
- iii. Notice how you are rewarding their lack of initiative.

**i. Case: Shows a Pattern of problem behavior.**

- i. Solution: Learn to look for the pattern
  - 1. STATE your path about the pattern.
  - 2. Issue can shift from behavior to attitude; i.e. lack of trust and respect.

**j. Case: I Need Time to Calm Down**

- i. Solution: Make a mutual agreement to take a break but be willing to return.

**k. Case: Endless Excuses**

- i. Solution: Talk about the pattern not the individual case.

- l. Case: Insubordination (or over-the-line disrespect)
  - i. Solution: Show zero tolerance for behavior.
  - ii. Speak up immediately and respectfully.
  
- m. Case: Regretting Saying Something Horrible
  - i. Solution: Express your story before it builds up to something unmanageable.
  - ii. Avoid crucial conversations while angry or otherwise emotionally upset.
  - iii. Apologize as is appropriate.
  
- n. Case: Touchy and Personal
  - i. Solution: Establish mutual purpose.
  - ii. Share something that could be helpful but hard to hear.
  - iii. Explain you don't want to hurt their feelings.
  
- o. Case: Word Games
  - i. Solution: Focus on pattern of behavior.
  - ii. Talk about behaviors and outcomes.
  - iii. Hold them accountable to results.
  
- p. Case: No Warning that there has been a problem
  - i. Solution: Explain that when giving an assignment there are two acceptable paths:
  - ii. Complete the assignment as planned.
  - iii. Inform me immediately if there is a problem
  
- q. Case: Dealing with someone who breaks all the rules
  - i. Solution: Consider the following:
    - 1. What bothers you the most?
    - 2. What might be the easiest to work on?
  - ii. Pick one element and work on it.
  - iii. Establish Mutual Purpose.